

10th grade Cambridge Examination: Teaching an academic discussion essay through differentiated teaching methods

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Educational Program of the Autonomous Organization of Education “Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools” (AEO) has founded NIS-Programme for secondary and high school students. Students of 10th and 12th grades pass exams of the external summative assessment (hereinafter SA) in accordance with International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) standards. Exam materials for SAs developed jointly with the Council Cambridge assessments for international education (CCAIE) and are aimed at measuring the functionality of the acquired knowledge and formed skills of a wide range through the implementation of various types of tasks.

Examination tasks on the discipline of “English language” complies with the International General Certificate of Secondary Education standards. Exam assignments for the grade 10 cover the content curriculum for grades 9-10. The format of External Summative Assessment for “English language” covers:

- Listening section (25 points)
- Reading section (25 points)
- Writing section (30 points)

overall 55 points.

English comprehension covers reproductive and productive skills. Reproductive skills consist of listening and reading tasks, while productive skills are speaking and writing tasks. In terms of complexity and assessment, writing skills require more time and effort than reproduction skills (Jaashan, 2022). Writing in a foreign language is recognized as an important skill for education, personal development, and logical thinking capacity (Weigle, 2009).

External Summative Assessment for “English language” Writing Section covers various writing tasks such as magazine articles, newspaper reports, short stories, academic essays, and formal/informal letters. Writing tasks have different structures and purposes, so students are confused with different writing tasks. Compared to other writing tasks academic essay writing comprises six essay types and each one has a certain structure to follow. Academic essay types in the Cambridge Exam are (1) Opinion essay, (2) Discussion essay, (3) Advantage and Disadvantage (for and against) essay, (4) Discursive essay, (5) Problem and Solution, (6) Cause and Solution essay.

In term III 10th grade students learnt academic essay writing and its structure. The present lesson study covered a Discussion Essay.

Lesson research objectives:

- 1) developing differentiated teaching methods;
- 2) teaching 10th grade students to write a discussion essay in an academic structure;
- 3) integrating discussion essay writing with a topic of “City life”.

II. METHODOLOGY

The lesson research was conducted at Nazarbayev Intellectual School of Chemistry and Biology in Shymkent. The research site is one 10th grade which consists of 12 students. In a group of three teachers conducted three research lesson cycles to develop differentiated teaching methods and teach students to write an academic discussion essay.

Table 1. Teachers participating in Lesson Study

| Teachers | Teaching experience | Qualification | Education background |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Teacher 1 | 30 years | Moderator | Master’s degree in Psychology |
| Teacher 2 | 20 years | Teacher | Bachelor degree in Teacher of English language |
| Teacher 3 | 8 years | Teacher | Master’s degree in Inclusive Education |

Three teachers have a mix of teaching experience, Teacher A is a senior teacher, Teacher B has long teaching experience in different educational institutions, Teacher B has 8 years of teaching experience mainly at NIS school system.

The lesson study covered twelve students overall, but three were in main attention, while observing the lesson and analyzing their final essay assignments. Three students were selected according to their English learning abilities and results of Summative Assessments Exams of the second term (SAT 2).

Table 2. Students observed by teachers

| Students | Grade | Results of SAT 2 | English level |
|-----------|-------|------------------|------------------------|
| Student A | 10 | Excellent (85%) | Upper-intermediate |
| Student B | 10 | Excellent (88%) | High Intermediate (B2) |
| Student C | 10 | Good (69%) | Low Intermediate (B1) |

ACTION PLAN

The lesson study consisted of three lesson cycles and each cycle had four major stages to follow. The following action plan clearly describes each stage:

Stage 1: Teaching Discussion essay structure via differentiated method

- 1.1 Initial meeting of LS group to determine what it is that you want to improve.
- 1.2 Joint planning of first research lesson (Lesson plan 1)
- 1.3 Teach and observe first research lesson (Observation list)
- 1.4 Interviewing pupils

1.5 Post RL 1 discussion and initial plans for RL2

Stage 2: Analyzing sample essays and learning new vocabulary about “City life”

1.1 Joint planning of second research lesson (Lesson plan 2)

1.2 Teach and observe second research lesson (Observation list)

1.3 Interviewing pupils

1.4 Post RL 1 discussion and initial plans for RL3

Stage 3: Planning and writing a discussion essay

1.1 Joint planning of third research lesson (Lesson plan 3)

1.2 Teach and observe third research lesson (observation list)

1.3 Interviewing pupils

1.4 Post RL 1 discussion and summarizing overall findings.

1.5 Write up/present what you have discovered. Conduct a public research lesson.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**Stage 1****Teaching Discussion essay structure via differentiated method**

Teachers discussed learning objectives and planning of the first lesson. The lesson plan covered two learning objectives such as

- **10.W4** use style and register to achieve appropriate degree of formality in a growing variety of written genres on a range of general and curricular
- **10.W5** develop with support coherent arguments supported when necessary by examples and reasons for a wide range of written genres in familiar general and curricular topics.

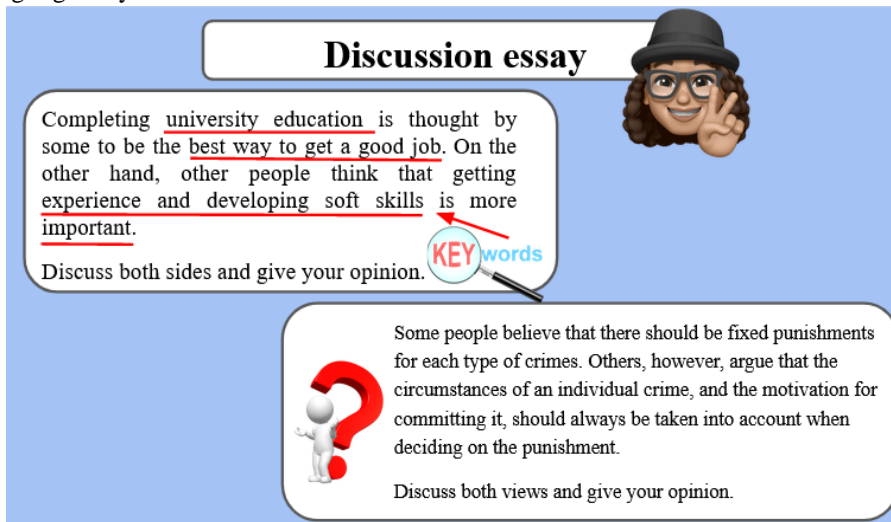
The lesson lasted 40 minutes and covered three major activities such as

Lead-in: welcoming students, explaining the lesson objectives, and handing out four essay samples (opinion, discussion, problem and solution, advantages and disadvantages) to distinguish the essay structures.

Main part: Teacher explains “Discussion essay” question types and planning structure.

PPT 1. Whole class activity.

Students should highlight key words in the statement and instruction.



Discussion essay

Completing university education is thought by some to be the best way to get a good job. On the other hand, other people think that getting experience and developing soft skills is more important.

Discuss both sides and give your opinion. **KEY words**

Some people believe that there should be fixed punishments for each type of crimes. Others, however, argue that the circumstances of an individual crime, and the motivation for committing it, should always be taken into account when deciding on the punishment.

Discuss both views and give your opinion.

PPT 2. Discussing common mistakes in writing Discussion essay

Common mistakes

- Not giving your opinion
- Not discussing both sides
- Giving much more attention to one side than the other
- Presenting too many reasons for each view: you MUST develop ALL of your ideas to get a high band score, so it's best to present 1-2 reasons for each view and explain them all
- Not writing your opinion in much detail. You should try to give some reasons for your view
- Writing an overly general statement about the topic in the introduction (e.g. "Healthcare is a topic of hot debate.")
- Your main ideas are not explained and illustrated enough.
- Including ideas and information that does not directly answer the essay question
- Not fully understanding the essay question(s). This is often caused by reading the question quickly, not carefully.
- Using memorised phrases (e.g. "a hot topic", "in a nutshell", "my considered opinion")
- Using "research studies" as examples: examples should illustrate your ideas, not prove them.
- Trying to use rare or "novel" language: examiners are looking for groups of words used naturally, not rare words.

<https://ieltscharlie.com/ielts-discuss-both-views-essay/>

PPT 3. Discussion essay structure

- Teacher divides students into small groups in accordance with their information perceptions (visual, auditory, kinesthetic). The VAK Learning Styles Model is one of differentiated teaching methods, students feel comfortable in working with similar ones. Students should go through the sample essays and make Discussion essay structure. Finally, each group presents their papers.
 - Teacher shows and explains Academic Discussion essay structure.
 - Students should compare their structures, find differences and similarities.
- This activity covers two lesson research objectives (1) using VAK learning style and developing differentiated teaching style and (2) teaching students to follow an academic essay structure.

Discussion essay structure

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Paragraph I - Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- paraphrase the question;- outline both sides and give your opinion; <p>Paragraph II - Negative viewpoint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- topic sentence- explain why- example- state if you agree or not | <p>Paragraph III - Positive viewpoint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- topic sentence;- explain why;- example;- state if you agree or not <p>Paragraph IV - Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- summarise main points- give your opinion |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Conclusion: Reflection on the lesson

Students reflected on the lesson and answered the following questions:

- What did you enjoy about that lesson?
- What did you learn? (What can you do now that you could not do? What can you do better? How is it better?)
- What aspect of the teaching worked best for you?
- If the same lesson is being taught to another group what would you change? Why would you change that aspect?



Student A reflected as “I enjoyed the group activity because I had a chance to practise English with peers. I learnt about Discussion essay, I liked it. Essay writing is difficult for me, but when I know the strategy, it is less challenging. I would suggest giving more samples with common mistakes. I guess we make many common mistakes at first time”.

Student B responded as “I liked the lesson, it was as usual. I do not like writing; it requires many things like vocabulary, structure, grammar, and even handwriting. I like the lesson because it was clear without complicated examples and structures. I think I can manage writing Discussion essay. I would like to analyze more high scoring essays”.

Student C briefly stated, as “I was a bit nervous because when Teacher said “Discussion essay” It takes a lot of effort and preparation to write a good essay for me. I learnt the essay structure; it will be helpful in the exam. I would like to have more group work, when I discuss with group mates I fell less anxious.”

Teachers fill the lesson observation list.

Stage 2

Analyzing sample essays and learning new vocabulary about “City life”

Teachers discussed learning objectives and planning of the second lesson. The lesson plan covered two learning objectives such as

- **10.W5** develop with support coherent arguments supported when necessary by examples and reasons for a wide range of written genres in familiar general and curricular topics.
- **10.R7** recognise typical features at word, sentence and text level in a wide range of written genres, including some which focus on unfamiliar topics

The lesson lasted 40 minutes and covered three major activities such as

Lead-in: welcoming students and explaining the lesson objectives. Asking students to write collocations about “City life/Urban life” on the board. Introducing the lesson topic.

Main part:

- Pre-task activity: Introducing vocabulary on the topic “Cities vs. Countryside”.

The vocabulary handouts are of two types (a) collocations with definitions in English for high-achieving students and (b) collocations with translations into Russian and illustrations for low-achieving students. The task is differentiated based on students’ English levels.

- Task: Students read and discuss one good sample discussion essay on the topic

“Some people think it is better for children to grow up in the city, while others think that countryside is more suitable for them. Discuss both views and give you opinion”

- Post-task: Pair work. Students should compare the sample essay and the discussion essay structure, find out topic sentences and ideas, examples; Analyze the grammar structures and topic-specific vocabulary.

Conclusion: Reflection on the lesson

- Students reflected on the lesson and answered the following questions:

Student A replied as “I like when we discuss a topic vocabulary; it helps to learn new words in context. Then I liked sample essay reading and analyzing, because I can learn by heart some sentence structures and use them further. The lesson was perfect, I don’t have any suggestions”.

Student B said, “The lesson was great. Now I am more confident that I can write SA paper easily. I know the essay structure, topic vocabulary, and grammar structure. Sample essay analysis in pair was a great idea, we discussed and analyzed it”.

Student C reflected as “I liked the vocabulary list; it is to learn new words with translations. Sometimes I cannot write a good essay because I simply do not know topic words. I felt embarrassed while working in pairs, because my class mate’s English level is upper-intermediate. I would suggest next time to sit with my level student”.

- Teachers fill the lesson observation list.

Stage 3

Planning and writing a discussion essay

Teachers discussed learning objectives and planning of the third lesson. The lesson plan covered two learning objectives such as

- **10.W4** use style and register to achieve appropriate degree of formality in a growing variety of written genres on a range of general and curricular

- **10.W5** develop with support coherent arguments supported when necessary by examples and reasons for a wide range of written genres in familiar general and curricular topics.

The lesson lasted 40 minutes and covered one major activity such as

Lead-in: welcoming students and explaining the lesson objectives. Students are expected to write a discussion essay.

Main part:

Pre-task activities: Students are given 5 minutes to revise all learnt materials and vocabulary. Question-Answer session with a teacher (5 minutes)

Task: Students should write a Discussion essay on the given topic within 180-220 words

“It is thought by some that it is better to live in the city while others believe that life is better in the countryside. Discuss both views and give your opinion”
Follow the structure and write your essay plan here. Teacher will check your planning as well.

1) Introduction
1st sentence – paraphrase the statement
2nd sentence – outline both sides and give your opinion

2) Negative viewpoint
1st sentence – topic sentence
2nd sentence – explain why
3rd sentence – example
4th sentence – state why you disagree (your opinion)

3) Positive viewpoint
1st sentence – topic sentence
2nd sentence – explain why
3rd sentence – example
4th sentence – state why you agree (your opinion)

4) Conclusion
1st sentence – summarise main points
2nd sentence – give your opinion

Grading criteria according to the International General Certificate of Secondary Education:

- Organization [6 points]
- Communication [6 points]
- Lexical resource [6 points]
- Grammar range and accuracy [6 points]
- Content [6 points]

Conclusion:

Student A

Some argue that urban areas are the most convenient place to live, while others reckon ^{that} it is better to live in rural settlement. Personally, I believe that living in cities is more preferable than living in villages because there are ~~many~~ ^{immense} numerous amenities available for citizens, ~~and~~ ~~even~~ ~~at~~ ~~though~~ although villages provide you with natural resources.

On the one hand, countryside is enticing with its picturesque nature and access to unpolluted sources ^{such} as fresh air and water. Villages attract especially urban people who suffer from social pressure and rapid pace in megacities.



those who need peaceful place to be ^{alone} ~~by themselves~~. For instance, ^{the} majority of humans ~~them~~ ^{people} ~~capital~~ from developed countries try to avoid noisy places on the weekends therefore tend to spend their time in silent ~~places~~ ^{places}, beyond the cities.

life ~~is better~~. Although, I reckon ~~that~~ that in a long perspective ~~living in countryside is far worse~~ because there are no opportunities to develop and ~~achieve high standards of living~~ there are low standards of living.

On the other hand urban areas provide citizens with necessary amenities like as medicine and educational facilities. ~~Living in cities gives~~ ^{Living in} cities gives innumerable job opportunities and apartment ~~with~~ ^{which} fits high standards of living.

~~to example diseases get common diseases more less than those who live in villages~~

A great example would be that ~~average unemployment~~ in modern cities unemployment among humans is not ^a relevant problem.

From my view of thinking, it is ^{the} best place to live because ~~yes~~ citizens purchase all modern standards.

In conclusion, although living in villages ~~is~~ ^{is} better in terms ~~of our health~~ of our health, I reckon living in urban settlement brings more amenities and gives you ~~two~~ ^{two} myriad possibilities to develop.

Organization: 5/6 Communication: 4/6 Lexical resource: 6/6

Grammar range and accuracy: 4/6 Content: 5/6

Overall: 5

The introduction is well-structured, the second sentence outlines main ideas which are discussed in the main body one and two.

The main body one consists of four sentences according to the Discussion essay structure. Student A revealed the sub-theme of "countryside" with two arguments of "unpolluted sources such as fresh air and water" and "social pressure".

The main body two explores the sub-theme of "urban life", however, it is not clear and eligible because of Student A's handwriting. Grammar range is good enough with present tenses, modal verbs, and linking words.

Conclusion part consists of two sentences and summarizes all main points. Lexical resource is excellent, collocations are according to the topic.

Student B

It is frequently argued that residing in urban area is a better option rather than rural life in ^a rural area. Even though countryside people are famous for their well-being and ~~strong~~ ^{strong} immun system. I hold the view that there are more benefits while living in the city.

On the one hand, country-dwellers have

a total access to food ~~filled~~^{fortified} with vitamins and nutrients which help them to stay fit and slim. Moreover, they always exercise while doing their duties like milking the cow and looking after sheep. For instance, Harvard university researchers had proved that rural people are more healthier than citizens for 15%. However, I do believe that city life is more beneficial.

On the other hand, (urban a) life in urban area ~~gives~~^{guarantees} high-quality education for their (citizens) ~~gives~~^{citizens}. Every (city-dw) infant in the city offspring is allowed to have 11 years (free) of free ed high-standard education. For example, according to the Cambridge university statistics only five ^{country} children out of twenty are able to compete with the urban offspring. I totally advocate this point of view and I guess that urban life gives people more opportunities.

To conclude, I would like to ~~say~~^{emphasize} that although you will be more healthier in countryside, ~~change~~^{change} to study for free in city is much better.

Organization: 5/6 Communication: 5/6 Lexical resource: 4/6
Grammar range and accuracy: 5/6 Content: 5/6

Overall: 5

The introduction is clear, but does not outline main ideas of the whole essay.

The main body one consists of four sentences according to the Discussion essay structure. Student A revealed the sub-theme of “country life” with two arguments of “organic food fortified with vitamins” and “more physical activities”. Explanation sentence is simple and does not fully explore the argument. The example is relevant, and the final sentence is a good concluding remark.

The main body two explores the sub-theme of “urban life”, the paragraph is well-structured and well-linked with arguments. “High-quality education in city” is a string argument, example is relevant.

Conclusion part is unclear; it reveals more of personal position rather than summarizing the topic. Handwriting is clear, convenient to read and understand. Lexical resource is for Intermediate level, hardly could see vocabulary learnt in the lesson. Grammar range is impressive.

Student C

The question of whether it is better to live in the city or the countryside is a subjective opinion, and the answer depends on individual preferences and priorities. While some individuals may prefer the convenience and excitement of city living, others may prioritize the natural surroundings of rural living.

On the other hand, high dense places such as metropolitens, cities are more comfortable and developed than rustic residences. Urban places has

availability of job employment opportunities, well-built infrastructure, and access to amenities, and cultural diversity as some key advantages. However, living in the city comes with lack of green space, high cost of living, noise and pollution. The fast-paced and stressful nature of the city, also, can lead to higher levels of anxiety and other health-related problems. For example, New-York as the most developed city in the world has majority of people citizens with psychological problems. So, city living in my view, city live demands well-adjusted people to survive and it is not livelihood conditions for human.

On the other hand, village residents seems more cheerful than citizens. Supporters of rural places offers good life quality, lower life cost and access to outdoor diverse mental and physical activities such as hunting, fishing and camping. However, social media is less developed than city and villoges have limited job opportunities and challenging level of transport and medicine. For example, low developed villoges in Kazakhstan names is Znoha-korgan has overweight drawbacks due to lack of the Internet and an unreliable healthcare, with disgusting roads, but, their lives are happier than their neighbour cities. In my opinion, villoges is more beneficial and fruitful for human.

To sum up, all the points, this two debating life places have trait benefits and drawbacks. I reckon, that, while deducating the pros and cons of the statement, there are more reasons to choose rustic places as lifelong living location.

Organization: 5/6 Communication: 4/6 Lexical resource: 6/6

Grammar range and accuracy: 4/6 Content: 4/6

Overall: 4

The introduction is well paraphrased, but outline of main arguments are not clear.

The main body one explores the argument clearly. Vocabulary range is impressive as Student C integrated all learnt collocations. Compound adjectives are well-used, grammar range and accuracy are good.



The main body two explores the sub-theme of “rural life”, the paragraph is well-structured and well-linked with arguments. Examples are simple, next time Student C should provide more generalized examples and not be stuck on local issues.

Conclusion part is too generalized; there is an attempt to make a summary, however, some new ideas have appeared. .

CONCLUSION

The current lesson study cycle revealed that joint lesson planning is a practical and applicable instrument to develop teaching practices. Integrating differentiated teaching methods such as VAK learning style, group work, pair work, English level-based activities revealed positive results in students’ understanding of the topic.

Joint lesson planning and post lesson discussions were useful in planning “Discussion essay structure” and preparing lesson materials. Teachers’ observation lists, interviews with students/reflections contributed in identifying strength and weakness of teaching. Besides, observations revealed that Student C felt uncomfortable in pair work, because the classmate was a high-achieving student. In the following lessons, a pair work should be organized well. Students should be divided based on their personal interests/preferences and English levels.

Integrating the topic of “Discussion essay” and “City life” worked well, 10th grade students were able to manage the essay task. Overall, out of twelve students six received 5 points, three got 4 points, remaining three students received 3 points. Essay structuring, organization, and content were done in a high level; students became aware of the Discussion Essay structure and paragraphing.

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